

# Missing or Misplaced Commas

## STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Identify comma errors
- Correct comma errors

## RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

You will need photocopies for students of:

- **Student Lesson Summary**, p. 171
- **Practice Worksheets**, Levels A and B, pp. 172–173
- **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 175

## Teach

1. **Missing or Misplaced Commas:** Point out that **commas** are punctuation marks used in sentences as signals to readers, telling them when to pause. Write the pair of sentences on the board. Read the sentences aloud so students can hear that the comma signals the reader to pause.

### EXAMPLE

UNCLEAR: Soon after Icarus left Daedalus followed.

CLEAR: Soon after Icarus left, Daedalus followed.

- Tell students that commas are sometimes used to avoid confusion, as in the example. In such cases, a comma is placed where one idea must be separated from another in order to make a statement clear.
  - Then explain that, aside from avoiding confusion, there are also standard rules about other times when a comma's pause is needed. Explain that by learning five rules, students can master comma punctuation.
2. **Teaching Missing or Misplaced Commas:** Distribute the **Lesson Summary**. Go over the definitions in the **Academic Vocabulary** box. Review that when a text can be read with a confused meaning, a writer should clarify ideas by separating them with a comma. Next walk students through the following rules about other standard comma usage.
    - **Before Conjunctions:** Read **Rule 1** aloud. Point out that sometimes a sentence has a compound verb but is not a compound sentence. A comma should not be used in such a sentence. Write the following sentence on the board:

### COUNTEREXAMPLE

Daedalus **constructed** wings and **warned** his son.

You may also point out that a comma is not necessary in compound sentences consisting of very brief clauses. Write the following sentence as another counterexample.

**COUNTEREXAMPLE**

Grace prepared the vegetables and Pat served them.

- **In a Series:** Go through the examples in **Rule 2**. Point out that the elements of a series can be nouns, adjectives, verbs, or phrases.
- **Between Adjectives:** Discuss the examples in **Rule 3**. Tell students that, in deciding whether to use a comma between two adjectives modifying one noun, they can try *two* tests: **Test 1**—Place the word *and* between the adjectives. If the sentence still makes sense, replace *and* with a comma. **Test 2**—Reverse the order of the adjectives. If the meaning of the sentence does not change, use a comma. Give students an example of a sentence that would fail both tests:

**COUNTEREXAMPLE**

Each pair of wings had many light feathers.

- **Around Interrupters:** As you discuss the examples in **Rule 4**, remind students that a comma is also needed after an introductory subordinate clause. Write on the board:

**EXAMPLE**

After Icarus flew too close to the sun, his wax wings melted.

- **Omit for Essentials:** Work through the examples in **Rule 5**. Tell students that the most important thing to keep in mind for appositives or clauses, is to omit commas when the phrase or clause is essential to meaning—that is, when the sentence would make *no* sense or a completely different sense if the words were missing.

**QUICK CHECK.** Write each sentence on the board and ask students to explain what is wrong and to correct the error.

1. The skateboard park includes a range a half-pipe and a jumping track. (*Commas are needed to separate items in a series. The skateboard park includes a range, a half-pipe, and a jumping track.*)
2. After the park's grand opening all of us skateboarders tried it out. (*A comma is missing after an introductory phrase. After the park's grand opening, all of us skateboarders tried it out.*)
3. The skateboard park my second home is a real asset to our community. (*Commas are needed to set off the nonessential appositive phrase. The skateboard park, my second home, is a real asset to our community.*)

## Practice and Apply

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Activities involving missing or misplaced commas appear on pp. 172–173.

- Assign **Practice Worksheet A** to students who need more structured activities.
- Assign **Practice Worksheet B** to grade-level or above-level students.

**Answer Key: Practice Worksheet A**

1. In 1989, an oil tanker, the *Exxon Valdez*, went aground off the coast of Alaska.
2. Eleven million gallons of smelly, sticky oil spilled out of the tanker.
3. The ocean current spread the oil, and the resulting oil slick soon covered 1,300 miles of Alaska's shoreline.
4. The magnificent, sparkling beaches of Alaska, which were home to many species, turned oily and black.
5. The spill killed approximately 2,800 otters, 300 seals, 350 bald eagles, and 250,000 shorebirds.
6. Ten years later, there were signs of recovery.
7. In an effort to help restore wildlife, a council was established after the spill.
8. Molly McCammon, the council's director, indicated that things were looking better.
9. The numbers of bald eagles, pink salmon, and many species of shorebirds were strong.
10. She added, however, that more work needed to be done to improve the numbers of seals, herring, and ducks.

**Answer Key: Practice Worksheet B**

1. In 1869, Leopold Trouvelot, a French scientist, imported caterpillars to Massachusetts.
  2. Trouvelot hoped to crossbreed the adult form of these caterpillars, known as gypsy moths, with the moths of silkworms.
  3. He thought, perhaps foolishly, that he could create a new American caterpillar.
  4. Cherishing his dream, Trouvelot believed that the new crossbreed would make valuable silk.
  5. Unfortunately, Trouvelot's misguided experiment had a terrible outcome.
- 6–12. One day, a gust of wind knocked over a caterpillar cage in Trouvelot's house. As you can imagine, this unexpected event created quite a mess. Crawling out an open window, the caterpillars escaped. Soon they grew into adult moths and migrated. Over many years, the moths spread to New York, Maryland, and Virginia. Now they have become annoying, dangerous pests that destroy healthy trees. Who would have believed, readers, that so much trouble could have come from one mishap?

**Assess and Reteach**

Use these guidelines to determine if students need the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

- **Practice Worksheet A:** Students should answer at least eight items correctly.
- **Practice Worksheet B:** Students should answer at least four of items 1–5 correctly, and should make no more than one mistake in correcting the paragraph in items 6–12.

For students who need reteaching, review the **Lesson Summary**. Focus on the examples, and relate them to the rules. Brainstorm one or two new examples with students. Then have them complete the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

**Answer Key: Reteaching Worksheet**

1. In 1928, Sir Alexander Fleming, a British scientist, accidentally discovered a solution to a serious medical problem.
2. While working at a London hospital, Fleming studied staphylococci.
3. Staphylococci, as you may be aware, are a strain of bacteria.
4. Fleming's research involved preparing bacteria cultures, examining any changes in the cultures, and recording any important findings.
5. One day Fleming was cleaning his new lab equipment, and he noticed something strange.
6. In one dish, a small patch of mold grew, and Fleming wondered why. (*second comma optional*)
7. The bacteria, after all, were known to harm most living things.
8. Instantly, Fleming realized that the mold held the answer to a great medical problem.
9. In time, Fleming and other scientists used the mold to develop penicillin, the world's first antibiotic drug.
10. Today, penicillin treats pneumonia, spinal meningitis, and flu.